

REVIEW

Krzysztof Puławski. 2025. *Stworzone w przekładzie.*

Opowieść o tłumaczeniu poezji

[Created in Translation. A Story About Translating Poetry].

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Would you believe that a 506-page translation studies monograph which begins with the sentence: “The various definitions of translation [...] tend to focus on the fact that it is the ‘transfer’ (*translatio*) of a text from one language into a text in another language” (p. 12), followed by quotations from Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, Eugene Nida and Krzysztof Hejwowski as well as a footnote that is longer than the main text, could be a book that you would find very difficult to put down? Please take a look into Krzysztof Puławski’s newest publication then and have a try for yourself.

This book is an absorbing read most likely for two reasons: 1. the theories and typologies presented/reminded here are illustrated with plenty of excellent exemplifications – to mention just a few: from limericks, songs by Jeremi Przybora, Michael Flanders, Tom Lehrer, Frank Sinatra and Patti Smith, through *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* to William Butler Yeats, of course – all brilliantly narrated; 2. the entire argument stems from the author’s own extensive literary translation and teaching practice. “The primary impetus for writing this book was my work on *Wiersze wybrane* [Selected Poems] by William Butler Yeats and the essay ‘O tłumaczeniu poezji’ [On the Translation of Poetry], which opens that volume. I tried to gather there remarks on translating poetry and in the course of writing it I realised that I knew a great deal more, and I would gladly continue. In fact, I have been circling around the subject for many years”, states Puławski (p. 506). This book’s matter “relates to my experiences – all that I have participated in or witnessed over the last forty years of my translation activities and a good dozen years of my academic activity.” *Stworzone w przekładzie* is a piece (a fair chunk!) of applied

translation criticism, theory-based and 'self-tested', confirmed by the author's own literary translation experience.

A scholarly monograph like this is evidently very difficult to read cold. The author's voice is so personal, clear and evocative, that reading turns naturally into an internal dialogue with that voice – even if we are not always willing to agree fully with the presented diagnoses, opinions and interpretations.

"I confess that the first words of this book were meant to sound different. I wanted to start with the sentence: 'Forty years I have worked in poetry translation and this is my love story'." (p. 82) [*Ha! That's what I suspected!*]

"I can't imagine a lesson on William Blake's 'The Tyger', during which pupils could read any translation of the work, and then in the course of it the teacher would not refer to the original text." (p. 31) [*Neither do I. But how does this case relate to Billy Collins' poem 'Introduction to Poetry', presented to us only in Polish translation (by the Author?), a thorough reading of which "should be a prelude to all literary translating" (p. 28)? And to the highly controversial typology of prestige, which is supposed to determine the degree of interference with the translated text (p. 329–330)?*]

"The Polish translation of *Finnegans Wake* [...] has not, as far as I know, received any comprehensive translation criticism or review. This is probably due to the fact that the translator knows much more about the text itself than any of his potential critics." (p. 42) [*touché!*]

"I am, however, inclined to forgive translators of poetry for interpretative errors, provided, that they use them creatively." (p. 49, footnote) [*we give thanks unto thee, o gracious sir!*]

"When I was translating Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, my attention was drawn to two passages that were quite far apart:

She turned up the hallway again and opened a door into a large room, where light streamed in from the front windows and across the red and grey tiled floor.

And later:

The red and brown floor tiles were cracked or missing in places.

Both descriptions were of the same room, but in the first the tiles on the floor were ‘red-grey’ and in the second ‘red-brown’.

Surprised by this discovery, I corrected the discrepancy in my translation. Fortunately, I had enough time to think this decision through and eventually I back out of it. It’s not just that thirteen years had passed between the two descriptions and the tiles may have become discoloured, not even that the first description was made in the morning and the second in the late afternoon (in different light), but after all, the meaning of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* is that colours are not an objective value and we can perceive them differently.” (p. 325–326) [O.]

From the long line of metaphors of literary translation Puławski favours Ireneusz Kania’s metaphor of the circle – the original into which we patiently inscribe the polygonal figure of our translation. Yet his own circle is rather a wheel of fortune than a wheel of torture, one may think. The theme of sheer fun, joy and satisfaction comes through his book quite frequently: in chapter two we read about the “joy and obsession of translation” (p. 81), the final chapter “deals with an issue that is rarely addressed in translation studies, namely that translating poetry is a real fun for many translators, without which it would be much more difficult for them to face the challenges involved in this kind of translation, and that the enjoyment they derive from it can have a major impact on the translation of poetry” (p. 474).

“Poetic translation is difficult, but it can give a lot of joy. It requires work and causes problems, but overcoming them provides the translator with more satisfaction. It is full of life and light, but it also involves bad weather and everyday life.” (p. 477)

“Poetic translations are both difficult and pleasant, with a the proportion between these sensations varies from translator to translator. [...] Nevertheless, the satisfaction experienced is so great, that we all feel the journey is worthwhile.” (p. 478)

While preparing to write this short review, I could not find the official English-language title for this monograph. In the end the title *Created in Translation. A Story About Translating Poetry* (as any other excerpts from the book quoted here) is my – I hope relatively adequate, but what’s the word from the Author? – suggestion. However having written what I have written, I believe that this book is a tale. A tale of poetry and its translation. The true heir to the best traditions of literary translation

storytelling – the comparison with Stanisław Barańczak's *A Small but Maximalist Translatological Manifesto* comes to mind, and is not unjustified. Puławski also illustrates his argument with vivid examples, citing various translations: by amateurs publishing on the Internet, by his students, by more and less renowned translators of literature and sometimes by himself (the bravado of *Ciche mieszkanie!* The taste of his *guilty pleasures!*)

A fervent, fascinating tale. Fabulous.

Ewa Rajewska